



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

**OPENING REMARKS
by
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

**at the
Opening Ceremony of the Department of Marketing
of the Faculty of Economics of Subotica
in the Town of Bujanovac**

[Check Against Delivery]

Bujanovac, Serbia – 28 October 2011

Ministers,
Mr. Mayor,
Professors and Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many months ago we embarked on a journey together to establish a multilingual and multi-ethnic higher educational institution here in the town of Bujanovac. When the Serbian Government, the Albanian community and I jointly presented the results of the Feasibility Study back in March 2010, we had a vision that one day the doors of an academic department would open to all ethnic groups in south Serbia. We wanted to give young students the opportunity to study in their own languages, but use a common curriculum and a common space. We wanted to increase the economic opportunities in south Serbia by giving students from the region the chance to study close to home. I am very pleased to see that this vision is now becoming a reality.

What you have achieved so far is a unique and encouraging example of academic, cross-border co-operation. Professors from the Faculty of Economics in Subotica and from the State University of Tetovo will come all the way here to Bujanovac to give courses in economics and marketing, both in Serbian and in Albanian. This is a proof that in our knowledge-based society not only ideas travel fast and wide, but so do professors. The academic aim of expanding minds cannot be contained by State borders, linguistic differences or ethnic divisions. I want to warmly thank the University of Novi Sad and especially the Faculty of Economics in Subotica for taking up this challenge and for turning our vision into a reality in just a few months.

Dear friends,

This opening is also a good moment for reflection, to think back on why we attach such importance to the establishment of this multilingual institution. In diverse, multi-ethnic societies like those in south-eastern Europe, monolingual education is no longer adequate. Children of minority background need to learn their mother tongue, as we all do. But at the same time, they need to learn more languages to be competitive and well integrated members of the society they

share with others. If students belonging to national minorities are educated exclusively in their mother tongue, the risk of separation along ethnic and linguistic lines increases. This has a negative effect on their acquisition of the State language, on their prospects in the labour market and on interethnic relations in general, since the classroom is a great place to forge friendships. At the same time, students from ethnic minority backgrounds can be disadvantaged compared to their peers if they have to follow an academic programme in a language other than their own, particularly in their first years after graduating from high school. That is why we insisted that this department should be genuinely multilingual. It should offer ethnic Albanian students the opportunity to take some courses in their native language, but also give them a chance to learn Serbian at an advanced level. I therefore warmly welcome the compromise that you have found in which most courses are taught in Albanian in the first year, and the number of courses in Serbian increases in the following years. This model is an example of how multilingual education can be used in practice to solve the dilemma of “either mother-tongue or State-language education”. Your joint effort here shows that you *can* have both and create a win-win situation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is also a good moment to express my gratitude and to acknowledge the hard work that went into this undertaking. The Serbian Government, represented here by Ministers Markovic and Obradovic, truly deserves praise for its achievements. Not only do I want to congratulate you for bringing this difficult project to fruition, I also welcome that you have done so in close co-operation with the Albanian National Minority Council and the local authorities. By involving the Council and local leaders throughout the entire process you have been able to ensure that the department meets local needs and has strong local ownership, which is crucial for its success. As High Commissioner on National Minorities, I actively advocate effective participation and consultation as two of the key principles to ensure that minorities have a say in decisions that concern them. This may mean that processes take longer and are more difficult because compromises have to be found that may require all sides to shift from their initial positions. But in the end, this leads to outcomes that are more sustainable and that build trust rather than suspicion.

I am confident that the establishment of this department is such an outcome. It has shown that several government ministries can work successfully together with academic institutions, minority representatives, local authorities and the international community to improve the conditions for the local population. The Government of Serbia today shows its commitment to this region. The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the provincial government of Vojvodina all invested considerable political and financial capital in this project. This investment is particularly impressive in light of the budgetary challenges and the need for austerity that face many governments in the region, including the Serbian Government.

Here in Bujanovac itself, the Albanian National Minority Council and the local authorities, particularly Mayor Kamberi, put their prestige on the line by shouldering this project. When we struggled to find an institution to host the department, Dean Vunjak stepped in and provided us and the Government with the confidence that the department would meet high academic standards. These standards have been rigorously tested by the Accreditation Committee and the Ministry of Education. Sustained effort is now needed to ensure that this department will also withstand the test of time, and that it will prove to be not just a symbolic institution but one that will take its place as a high-quality addition within the Serbian academic system. This will make the degrees that it will award all the more valuable.

The team from the Co-ordination Body for the Municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja has been instrumental, and it has been a pleasure to work with you. I also would like to thank Ambassador Kypreos and his colleagues from the OSCE Mission, who have galvanized international support among the Friends of South Serbia. It is almost of symbolic significance that the opening takes place on the very last day of service of Mr. Jeroen de Vries, the OSCE's municipal co-ordinator in Bujanovac. Time and again, he spared no effort to make this opening a reality. This has truly been a team effort, and I am grateful to you all for your hard work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear students and professors,

The journey does not end here. There are many other challenges facing south Serbia that will require continued and concerted efforts from all of you and from all of us. Thanks to the programme of the Faculty of Economics of Subotica that will be taught here, those students who will graduate in a few years will have the academic qualifications to work in business and marketing. I am aware, however, that these degrees may not automatically bring them jobs.

Unemployment is still very high, and far too many young people are unable to find a job upon graduation. For this region to develop, there should be continued investment from both the public and the private sectors. The education system will need continued attention to ensure that every child has access to quality education, from primary school to university. There should be a stable and effective local government that can govern this multi-ethnic region based on trust, legitimacy and effective participation by members of all ethnic groups.

Dear students,

You have decided to enrol in a totally new academic institution. Your academic journey begins now. In the words of Aristotle, that most famous of teachers, “the roots of education are bitter, but the fruits are sweet”. I am confident that Dean Vunjak and Dean Pollozhani and their fellow professors in Subotica and Tetovo, will provide you with the intellectual tools to learn, to expand your horizons and to fulfil your potential. I trust that they will keep high educational standards, and I am certain that they will hold you accountable to them. The courses may be challenging, but the rewards will hopefully be significant. What is most important now is that you have the opportunity to study economics and marketing here in Bujanovac, both in the Albanian and in the Serbian languages. Many of us have worked hard to ensure that you got this opportunity. Now it is up to you to work hard to make good use of it. I wish you the best of luck.

Thank you for your attention.